Transgender lobby groups are encouraging vulnerable young people and their families to push for medical intervention regardless of whether specialists agree it is the best course of action, according to clinicians who have resigned in protest from the NHS’s leading gender identity clinic.

Mermaids, the most prominent transgender pressure group, insists it does not “favour”, “lobby” or “push” for young people who identify as transgender to pursue medical intervention.

Two other organisations, Gendered Intelligence, and the Gender Identity Research and Education Society (Gires) say they do not automatically support physical intervention.

However, frontline clinicians who assessed the thousands of young people coming to the Gender Identity Development Service (GIDS) for help, said they felt families were “systematically” demanding to be referred for life-changing hormone treatment on the advice of campaigners.

“Mermaids are always saying this is a matter of life and death. ‘Would you rather an alive boy or a dead girl?’ That Mermaids narrative is everywhere [within the service],” one former clinician claimed. “Mermaids sell themselves as a support group,” said another. “They are not. They are lobbyists. During sessions they would sit in the waiting room outside.” She accused Mermaids of exploiting parental anxiety to promote their own agenda — claims denied by Mermaids.

The GIDS’s own internal review acknowledged the rise in the number of families “presenting with their minds apparently made up”.

The same clinician said: “The reality is that if you say the right trigger words, get Mermaids on your side, by 11 you’ll be on hormone blockers and by 16 you’ll be on hormones. That’s not ethical.”

The GIDS said it was independent and committed to providing an environment where staff were protected from pressures. Mermaids insisted that it “does not tell people what to say or do” and “provides information and resources only”. In its successful submission for a £500,000 grant Mermaids told the National Lottery that its focus was “not medical treatment”.

Anna Friel and Callum Booth-Ford in Butterfly. Mermaids acted as consultants on the ITV series

This claim was dismissed by a third former clinician. “Mermaids, Gires, Gendered
Intelligence. . . they all act as if it were their service,” the clinician said. “They are able to call up executive members and influence them.” Another clinician said the GIDS received complaints that “you could tell were written by Mermaids because they are all the same”.

Mermaids admits that it supports families through the complaints process. Susie Green, the chief executive, said: “A system where complaints are denied or ignored would be highly unethical and goes against basic NHS principles. If Mermaids did not communicate with the clinic then it would face legitimate criticism.” She said the charity “does not encourage parents to demand any particular treatment”.

Jay Stewart, chief executive of Gendered Intelligence said the allegations were “unfounded”. “We recognise that medical intervention is not right for all young people,” he said. Bernard Reed, founder of Gires, said: “In medical literature. . . failure to provide timely treatment is described as ‘psychological torture’. As far as we are aware, GIDS has adequate safeguards against irreversible treatments being given inappropriately.”

The GIDS said: “The trust engages with a number of support groups, with a wide range of different positions. These groups include Mermaids and Gendered Intelligence but also those with quite opposite views. The trust always seeks to be independent and focus on the needs of individual children.”